



Online Harassment

Responding to Online Harassment

Online harassment includes bullying, trolling, threats, stalking, intimidation, or abusive messages delivered through digital platforms such as social media, email, messaging apps, gaming platforms, forums, or comment sections.

Harassment may involve:

- Repeated insults or humiliation
- Threats of harm to you, your family, or pets
- Sexual harassment or unwanted sexual messages
- Impersonation or doxxing (sharing private information)
- Coordinated pile-ons or mob harassment
- Persistent unwanted contact after being told to stop

Online harassment is real harm, not “just words,” and it can escalate quickly.

If you believe there is an immediate threat to your safety, call 911.

Online Harassment – Do This First

Assess Immediate Risk

- Treat the situation as urgent if harassment includes:
- Threats of violence
- Stalking or surveillance language
- Knowledge of your address, workplace, or school
- Encouragement of others to harm you

If any of the above are present, call 911 immediately.

Stop Engaging

- Do not argue, explain, defend, or retaliate
- Do not “feed the troll”
- Do not attempt to reason with someone being abusive

Continued engagement often escalates harassment.

Preserve Evidence

Before blocking or deleting anything, collect evidence.

- Screenshot or save:
 - Messages





- Comments
 - Usernames
 - Profiles
 - URLs
- Record:
 - Dates and times
 - Platforms involved
 - Frequency and escalation patterns

Do not edit or crop evidence if possible.

Contain and Protect Yourself

Preserve evidence first. If the harassment warrants local law enforcement involvement due to threats of physical violence, sexually explicit materials of minors, or other offensive messages, law enforcement may subpoena Social Media platforms for information on the perpetrator.

If social media companies ban an account prior to this subpoena, critical evidence could be lost. Always immediately report any messages to law enforcement that contain the following content prior to reporting the account:

- Threats of violence
- child sexual abuse material (CSAM) or sending sexually explicit messages or photos
- Taking a photo or video of someone in a place where he or she would expect privacy
- Stalking and hate crimes

Use Platform Safety Tools

Once evidence is preserved and reported if needed:

- Block the harasser
- Mute or restrict accounts
- Report harassment using platform tools
- Enable protections such as:
 - Blocking new or linked accounts
 - Comment filtering
 - Privacy or follower restrictions

Many platforms treat threats and harassment as policy violations.

Protect Your Circle

- Inform trusted friends or family
- Ask others not to engage with the harasser on your behalf
- If impersonation is involved, warn contacts immediately





If Harassment Continues or Escalates

Report to Authorities When:

- Threats are made
- Harassment is persistent or targeted
- Doxxing occurs
- There is evidence of CSAM, sexual exploitation, unlawful intimate images, or privacy-invasive photos/videos
- Harassments include taking a photo or video of someone in a place where he or she would expect privacy
- Stalking and hate crimes
- You fear escalation to offline harm

Report the Incident

- National Reporting
 - FBI Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3)
<https://www.ic3.gov>
- Ohio Resources
 - Ohio Attorney General – Identity Theft & Cybercrime Help
<https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov>
Hotline: 800-282-0515
- Geauga County
 - Geauga County Sheriff's Office
<https://www.geaugasheriff.org>
 - Local police non-emergency line for documentation or ongoing harassment

Law enforcement can:

- Document patterns
- Advise on protective orders
- Intervene if threats cross criminal thresholds

If the Harasser Is Someone You Know

If harassment comes from:

- A classmate or coworker
- A former partner
- A family member
- Someone with access to your physical location

Do not confront them alone.

Recommended steps:

- Preserve evidence quietly
- Seek guidance from law enforcement or a victim advocate





- Create a safety plan if escalation is possible
- Notify schools or employers when appropriate

Emotional & Crisis Support

Online harassment can cause anxiety, fear, shame, and isolation.

- 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
- If you may hurt yourself or feel unable to stay safe, call or text 988.

Seeking support is a strength, not a failure.

Recovery – After Harassment Is Addressed

- Monitor accounts for impersonation or renewed contact
- Revisit privacy settings periodically
- Document any new incidents immediately
- Reconnect with supportive people and routines

How to Reduce the Impact of Online Harassment

- Trust your instincts, discomfort is a warning sign
- You are never obligated to engage or explain yourself
- Silence and documentation are often safer than response
- Ask for help early; escalation thrives on isolation

